

Unit of Study: Character Sketch
Content Overview
Tad Hodgson, Victor Flake, Judy Leff

Unit Length: 6 weeks

Introduction: In this unit, students will learn how to bring characters to life in their writing by studying and applying the multi-dimensional qualities of characterization to a character sketch on someone they know well.

Mentor Texts List:

The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane by Kate DeCamillo

Howard B. Wigglebottom Learns to Listen by Binklow

Rosie and Michael by Judith Viorst

Song and Dance Man by Karen Ackerman

The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant

Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes

Julius, the Baby of the World by Kevin Henkes

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman

OR

Selected Excerpts (**pages 1-4**))

Week by Week Overview:

Week 1: Mentor Texts Inquiry/ Identify Character Traits

Week 2: Three Elements of Character

Week 3: Explosion Chart and Character Map

Week 4: Students Draft Character Sketches

Week 5: Dialogue and & Revision at Sentence Level

Week 6: Final Revision, Editing, Publication

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Week	Mini-Lessons	Student Assignment
1	<p>Mini-lesson: Mentor Text Inquiry (Choose 1-2 texts from Content Overview list)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ What is the author doing? ◆ Why is the author doing it? <p>Key Question: How does the writer make his/her characters come alive?</p> <p>Mini-lesson: Identifying Character Traits Handout (page 5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ With same Mentor Texts use handout to address 2 key questions: <p>Key Questions: What is a character trait? How do we find a character's traits?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use Character Traits lists (pages 6-7) as guide to naming traits 	<p>Writer's notebook work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Chart responses to MT inquiry questions ◆ Students list craft used by authors to make characters come alive. ◆ Answer 2 key question ◆ Complete chart: <u>Actions - Character Traits Revealed</u> for 2 mentor text examples ◆ Refer to Character Traits lists (pages 6-7) for naming traits
2	<p>Mini-lesson Inquiry: 3 elements of character with Unit of Study Character Sketch handout (page 8)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Physical appearance ◆ Actions, speech, behavior ◆ Interactions with others <p>Continue Inquiry with new texts from list</p>	<p>Writer's notebook work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Chart MT character traits based on 3 elements (choose from attached organizers (pages 9-11)) <p>Think about 3 elements +</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ appearance...looks like ◆ speech...says ◆ Feelings/thoughts ◆ actions...does ◆ strengths/weaknesses ◆ attitudes/opinions ◆ what others say/think ◆ environment
3	<p>Mini-lesson: Use Dan the Gardener Handout (page 12) as mentor text to lead discussion and complete the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Explosion chart for physical traits (page 13) ◆ Character map for personality traits (page 14) 	<p>Use Dan the Gardener text to complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Explosion chart ◆ Character map

4	<p>Mini-lesson: Create a character sketch of someone you know well</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Brainstorm list of people you know well in your life <p>Using student exemplar (pages 15-17) have students do the following with the person they have identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Create Character Map (page 15) ◆ Explosion Chart (page 16) ◆ Free write (page 17) <p>More mini-lesson ideas: Ch. 5, <u>What A Writer Needs</u> OR Chapters 7 & 8 from <u>Craft Lessons</u></p>	<p>Writer's notebook work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Brainstorm people in your life that you know well... inspired by MT (lots of talk), choose one person to write about ◆ Take notes, create character map, explosion chart for that person ◆ Free write ◆ Share in Peer Response Groups (PRG)
5	<p>Mini lesson: Dialogue through Fletcher:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Chapter 6, <u>A Writer's Notebook</u>: Snatches of Talk, read and discuss with class <p>Mini lesson: Revision at sentence level Use previous MT to model sentence structure, variation, punctuation (be sure to include dialogue)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Use Fletcher strategies to capture conversations of identified person, add those snatches of talk into their character sketch ◆ Students revise at sentence level, check sentence variation, punctuation (especially dialogue)
6	<p>Present rubric guide (page 23)</p> <p>Meet with students for final revision, editing, publication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Students use rubric (page 23) to ensure well rounded character sketch ◆ Students complete sketch for publication
	<p>Extend this project by creating a fictional character or a super hero cartoon. See attached student example (pages 18-22).</p>	

Jerry Spinelli, Knots in My Yo-Yo String

1

During my grade-school years, as I have mentioned, I considered Johnny Seeton one of my two best friends, the other being Roger Adelman.

As the years go by, there is something I remember about the Seetons even more than Johnny. It is his mother's whistle. With it she called in however many of her six children were away from the house at dinner-time. She would come out the kitchen door, stand by the fence, and deliver it once, maybe several times. It was not loud. Not nearly as loud as a hot Chevy revving or a kid yapping or a parent scolding. It was a simple two-note whistle. And yet her kids, all of us kids, no matter where we were—Kohn Street, the tracks, Red Hill—we always seemed to hear it.

Dinnertime upon dinnertime, year after year, Mrs. Seeton's whistle reeled in her kids. Sometimes the rest of us came running, too, to our own homes, for a mother's call somehow touches us all. Those two not-very-loud notes echo down to millennium's end and powerfully recall to me a time and a place. A fantasy I have goes like this: Mrs. Seeton returns to her house on Elm Street. The nineties neighborhood kids in bubble-soled sneakers stare at the gray, slow-moving woman whom they do not know. She goes to the backyard, to the old spot by the fence, and she whistles. It's the old two-noter, sounds exactly the way it did in 1955. She doesn't need to whistle again—one is all it takes, because we're already on our way. The nineties kids gape in amazement as we return from our homes and cemeteries around the world—Henry Doerner and Spider Sukoloski and Virginia Cory and Jerry Fox and the Teufels and even little Sharon Freilich, her knees still dirty but not crying anymore—across the Schuylkill River and along the tracks and the path and down the streets and nameless alleyways, all of us one more time heading home on Mrs. Seeton's whistle.

Character Sketch

From: Neighborhood Odes by Gary Soto

2

● DE TO MI GATO

He's white
As spilled milk,
My cat who sleeps
With his belly
Turned toward
The summer sky.
He loves the sun,
Its warmth like a hand.
He loves tuna cans
And milk cartons
With their dribble
Of milk. He loves
Mom when she rattles
The bag of cat food,
The brown nuggets
Raining into his bowl.
And my cat loves
Me, because I saved
Him from a dog,
Because I dressed him
In a hat and a cape
For Halloween,
Because I dangled
A sock of chicken skin
As he stood on his
Hind legs. I love *mi gato*,
Porque I found
Him on the fender
Of an abandoned car.

He was a kitten,
With a meow
Like the rusty latch
On a gate. I carried
Him home in the loop
Of my arms.
I poured milk
Into him, let him
Lick chunks of
Cheese from my palms,
And cooked *huevo*
After *huevo*
Until his purring
Engine kicked in
And he cuddled
Up to my father's slippers.
That was last year.
This spring,
He's excellent at sleeping
And no good
At hunting. At night
All the other cats
In the neighborhood
Can see him slink
Around the corner,
Or jump from the tree
Like a splash of
Milk. We lap up
His love and
He laps up his welcome.

Character Sketch

3

Growing Up
by
Russell Baker

C · H · A · P · T · E · R

10

Uncle Harold was famous for lying.

He had once been shot right between the eyes. He told me so himself. It was during World War I. An underaged boy, he had run away from home, enlisted in the Marine Corps, and been shipped to France, where one of the Kaiser's soldiers had shot him. Right between the eyes.

It was a miracle it hadn't killed him, and I said so the evening he told me about it. He explained that Marines were so tough they didn't need miracles. I was now approaching the age of skepticism, and though it was risky business challenging adults, I was tempted to say, "Swear on the Bible?" I did not dare go this far, but I did get a hint of doubt into my voice by repeating his words as a question.

"Right between the eyes?"

"Right between the eyes," he said. "See this scar?"

He placed a finger on his forehead just above the bridge of his nose. "That's all the mark it left," he said.

"I don't see any scar," I said.

"It's probably faded by now," he said. "It's been a long time ago."

I said it must have hurt a good bit.

"Hurt! You bet it hurt."

"What did you do?"

"It made me so mad I didn't do a thing but pull out my pistol and kill that German right there on the spot."

At this point Aunt Sister came in from the kitchen with cups of cocoa. "For God's sake, Harold," she said, "quit telling the boy those lies."

People were always telling Uncle Harold for God's sake quit telling those lies. His full name was Harold Sharp, and in the family, people said, "That Harold Sharp is the biggest liar God ever sent down the pike."

Character Sketches

From: Caramelo by Sandra Cisneros

4

Here is Father squinting that same squint I always make when I'm photographed. He isn't *acabado* yet. He isn't *finished*, worn from working, from worrying, from smoking too many packs of cigarettes. There isn't anything on his face but his face, and a tidy, thin mustache, like Pedro Infante, like Clark Gable. Father's skin pulpy and soft, pale as the belly side of a shark.

The Awful Grandmother is the one whose name ought to be the Parrot because she talks too much and too loudly, who squawks from the courtyard up to the second-story bedrooms, from the bedrooms down to the kitchen, from the rooftop all through the neighborhood of La Villa, the hills of Tepeyac, the bell tower of la Basílica de la Virgen de Guadalupe, the twin volcanoes—the warrior prince Popocatépetl, the sleeping princess Iztaccíhuatl.

The girl Candelaria has skin bright as a copper *veinte centavos* coin after you've sucked it. Not transparent as an ear like Aunty Light-Skin's. Not shark-belly pale like Father and the Grandmother. Not the red river-clay color of Mother and her family. Not the coffee-with-too-much-milk color like me, nor the fried-*tortilla* color of the washerwoman Amparo, her mother. Not like anybody. Smooth as peanut butter, deep as burnt-milk candy.

Tikis, who is always complaining about how much work he has to do, who never sits down and eats with the rest of us, because he's too busy washing Father's new station wagon for extra money, or polishing Father's shoes the way only Tikis can polish them, or making a chart with how many *pesos* there are to dollars, and finds an excuse to run off and eat somewhere alone, comes back from wherever he's been hiding with his empty glass and plate. Everyone else has gone to their rooms to sleep after eating. Except for me and Tikis.

Aunty Light-Skin wears metallic thread cocktail dresses to work, tight skirts with a kick pleat in the back and matching *bolero* jackets with cloth buttons. Beaded sweaters, grasshopper-green silk blouses with mandarin collars, or sleeveless crepe de chine. Crocodile-skin stilettos and crocodile handbag. Brown suede with leopard collar and leopard gloves. Pillbox hats with rhinestones on the veil. Aunty always looks elegant. Because she doesn't shop at El Palacio de Hierro or Liverpool like the other office girls. Her clothes are from Carson Pirie Scott and Marshall Field's.

Identifying Character Traits

Characters do things. They feel things. They hear things. They say things. They think things. They go places. They can walk, run, leap, and jump. They may sit and rock in a rocking chair. They may just lie in bed, sleep, and dream. But the important thing is that characters act.



And these actions show us what kind of people these characters are: friendly, sad, nosey, happy, lovestruck, confused, angry, or inventive.

What is a character trait?

When we talk about a character, we often describe that character in terms of **character traits**, descriptive adjectives like happy or sad that tell us the specific qualities of the character. They're the same kinds of words that we might use to describe ourselves or others, but we're using them to describe fictional characters in something we've read.

The author may tell us these traits directly, but more often the author will show us these traits in action. Our job as readers is to draw a conclusion about the character's traits (*to infer them*) from what the character says, thinks, and does. We might infer a character trait from something a character does only once, or we might draw our conclusions from a series of things the character says and does.

How do we find a character's traits?

An easy way to think about characters is to use a simple chart like the one below. You can start anywhere. There's no wrong way to make your list:

- jot down actions that the character takes then match them with descriptive adjectives in the character traits column.
- list character traits that match your character; then gather a list of actions from the book that support the traits you've listed
- jump back and forth between the columns listing ideas as they come to you; then go back to fill in the matching information for the related column.

For this example, we'll use the character of Harry Potter from *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*.

Actions	Character Trait They Reveal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • chases Malfoy when he takes Neville's Remembrall • runs to warn Hermione about the Mountain Troll on Halloween and helps Ron fight the Troll • works to protect the Sorcerer's Stone and keep it away from Lord Voldemort 	courageous, brave

Character Traits



humble
brave
courageous
serious
funny
humorous
sad
resourceful
stubborn
loyal
gullible
handsome
caring
carefree
selfish
unselfish
generous
self-confident
respectful
considerate
imaginative
inventive
creative
independent

studious
intelligent
honest
mischievous
friendly
adventurous
hard-working
timid
shy
bold
daring
dainty
busy
lazy
patriotic
fun-loving
successful
responsible
helpful
dreamer
happy
disagreeable
conceited
leader

demanding
bossy
gentle
loving
proud
wild
messy
neat
joyful
cooperative
lovable
ambitious
quiet
curious
witty
fighter
determined
energetic
cheerful
thoughtful
calm
mannerly
rude
mean

Sample Character Traits

able	demanding	hopeless	restless
active	dependable	humorous	rich
adventurous	depressed	ignorant	rough
affectionate	determined	imaginative	rowdy
afraid	discouraged	impatient	rude
alert	dishonest	impolite	sad
ambitious	disrespectful	inconsiderate	safe
angry	doubtful	independent	satisfied
annoyed	dull	industrious	scared
anxious	dutiful	innocent	secretive
apologetic	eager	intelligent	selfish
arrogant	easygoing	jealous	serious
attentive	efficient	kindly	sharp
average	embarrassed	lazy	short
bad	encouraging	leader	shy
blue	energetic	lively	silly
bold	evil	lonely	skillful
bored	excited	loving	sly
bossy	expert	loyal	smart
brainy	fair	lucky	sneaky
brave	faithful	mature	sorry
bright	fearless	mean	spoiled
brilliant	fierce	messy	stingy
busy	foolish	miserable	strange
calm	fortunate	mysterious	strict
careful	foul	naughty	stubborn
careless	fresh	nervous	sweet
cautious	friendly	nice	talented
charming	frustrated	noisy	tall
cheerful	funny	obedient	thankful
childish	gentle	obnoxious	thoughtful
clever	giving	old	thoughtless
clumsy	glamorous	peaceful	tired
coarse	gloomy	picky	tolerant
concerned	good	pleasant	touchy
confident	graceful	polite	trusting
confused	grateful	poor	trustworthy
considerate	greedy	popular	unfriendly
cooperative	grouchy	positive	unhappy
courageous	grumpy	precise	upset
cowardly	guilty	proper	useful
cross	happy	proud	warm
cruel	harsh	quick	weak
curious	hateful	quiet	wicked
dangerous	healthy	rational	wise
daring	helpful	reliable	worried
dark	honest	religious	wrong
decisive	hopeful	responsible	young

Unit of Study

Character Sketch

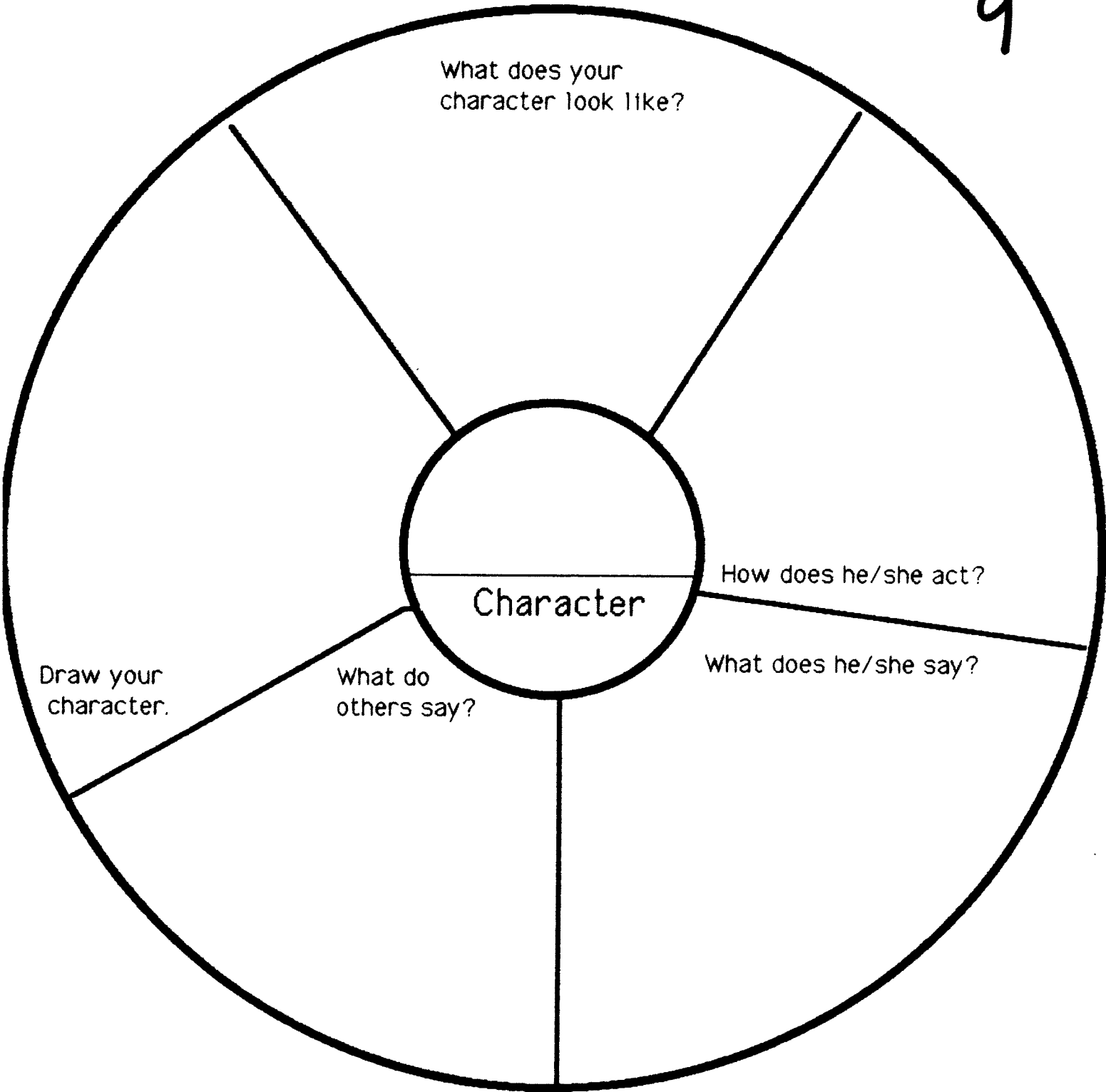
When you write a character sketch, you are introducing your reader to someone you know. You want the reader to have a strong mental image of that person including how the person looks, acts, talks and thinks.

A good way to write a character sketch is to put your person in a real setting and tell a little story about an encounter or an experience you had with him or her. Focus on the details that represent that person's unique qualities.

You are creating a snapshot of this person and making him or her come alive. Remember to show and not tell!

There are 3 elements of characterization:

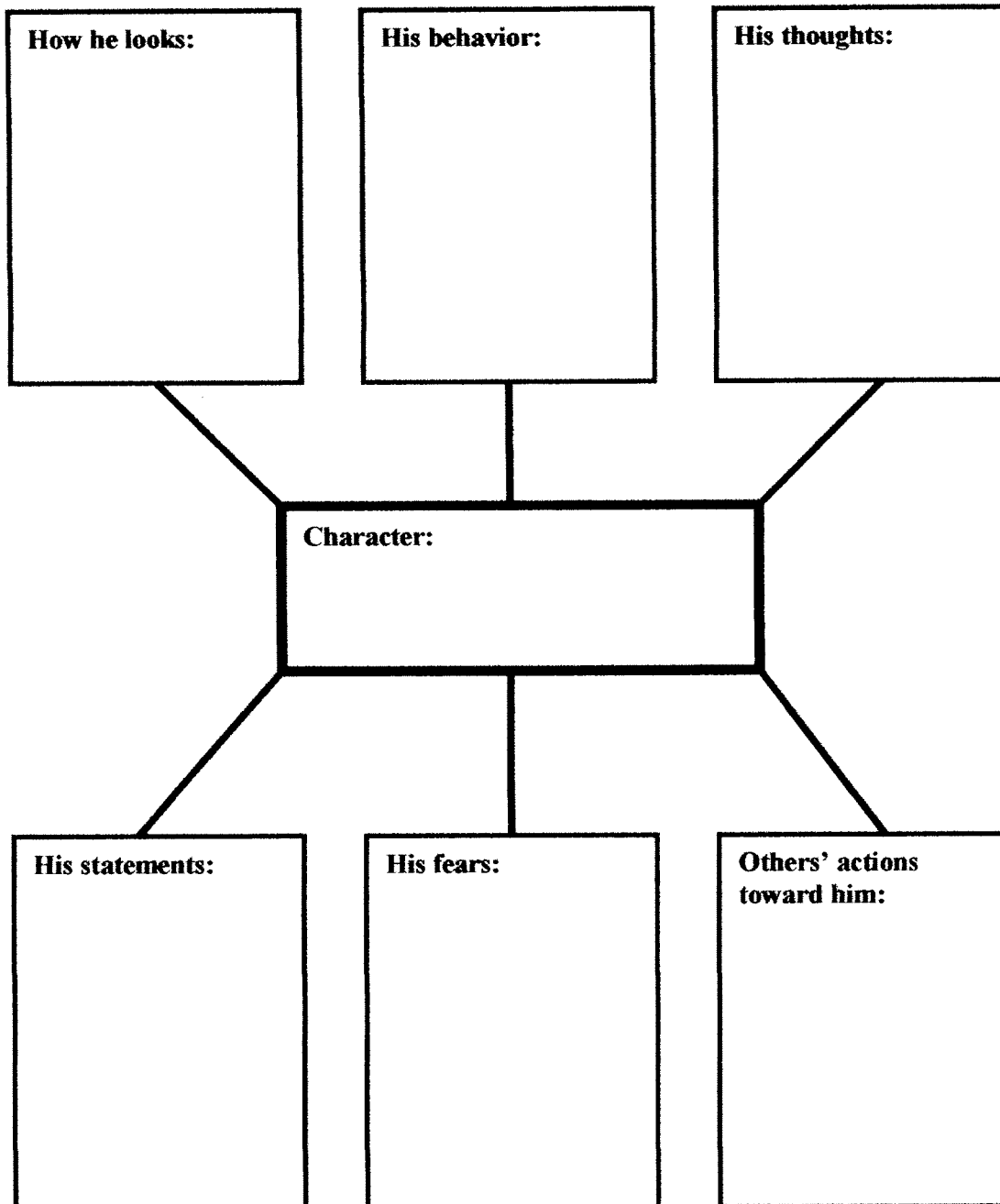
- **Physical appearance** - What does the character look like?
- **Actions, speech, behavior** - What does the character do/say? How does the character behave?
- **Interactions with others** - How do others react to the character?

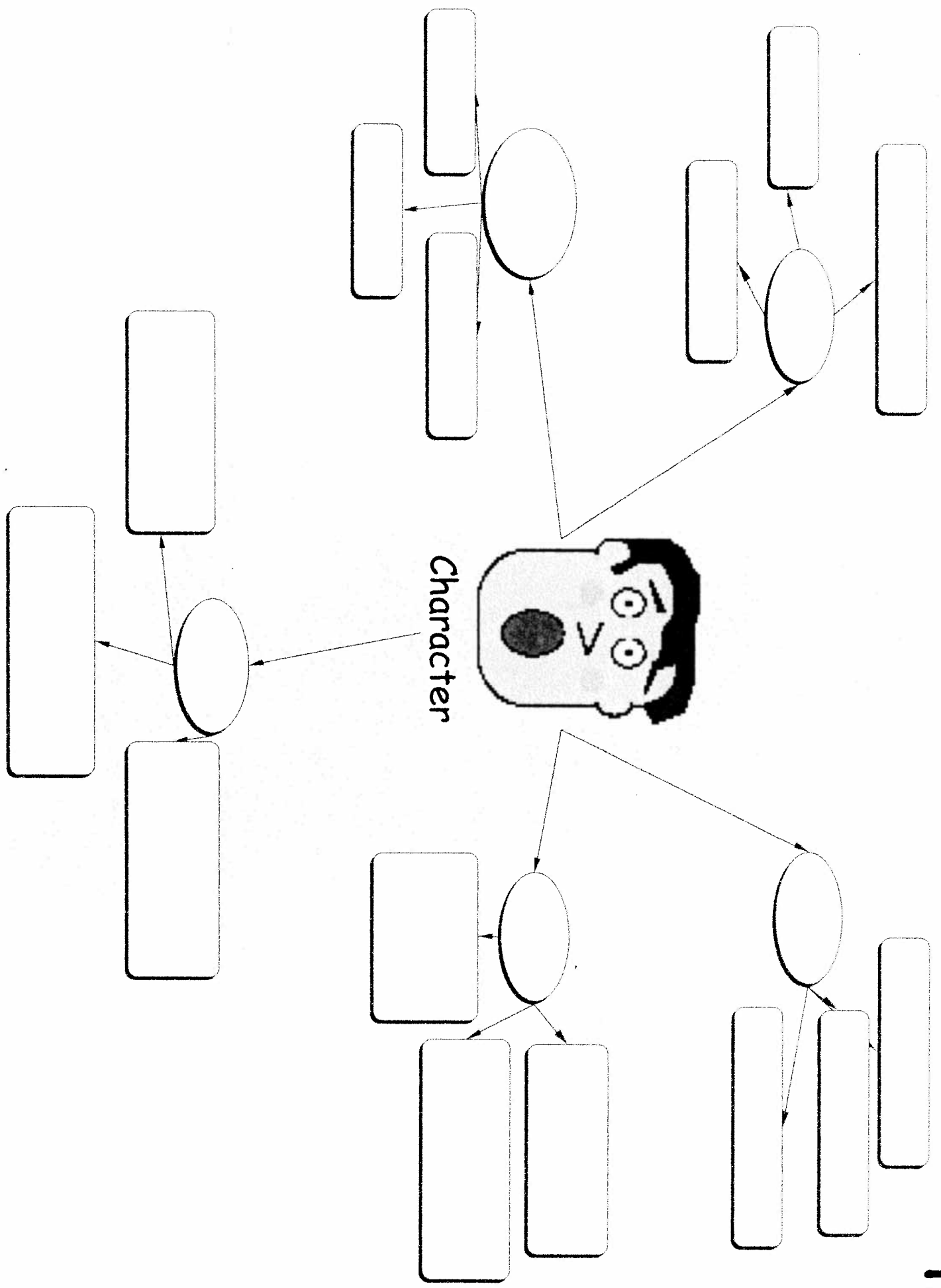


CHARACTER WHEEL

ATTRIBUTE WEB #2

Name: _____ Date: _____



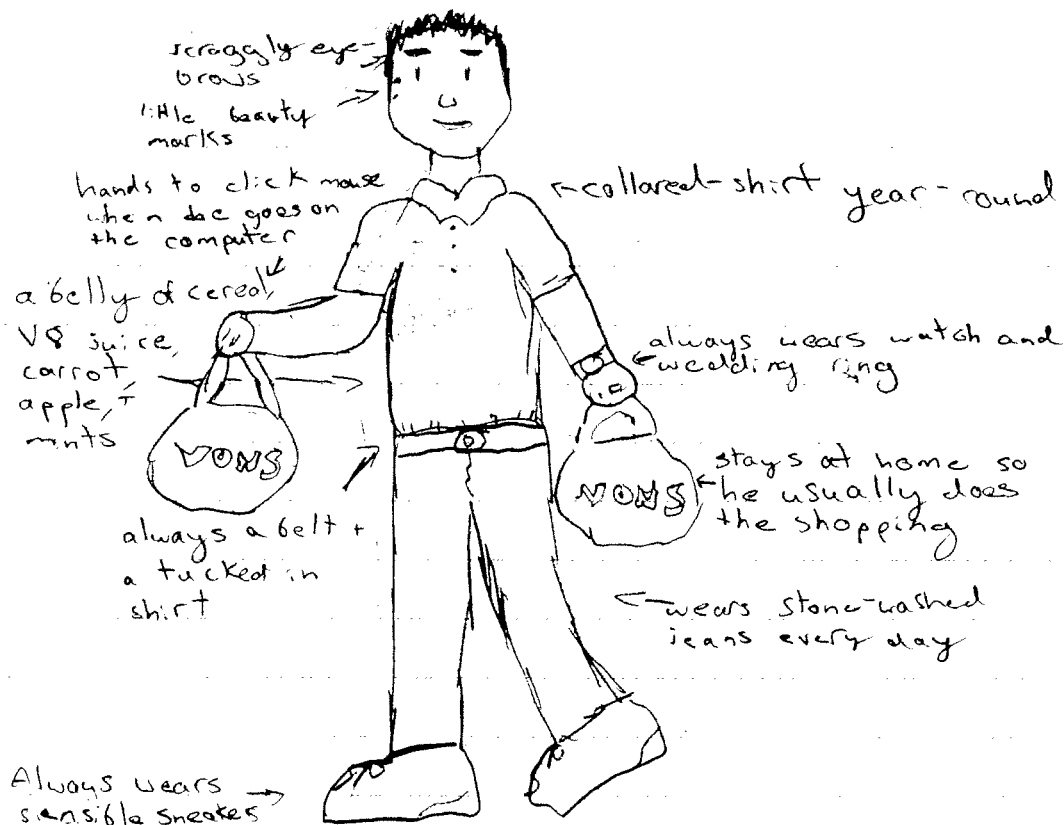


Character Trait Exemplar:

Dan the Gardener looks as if he belongs in his garden. He is about seventy years old and spends all day puttering outside. Everyday he wears the same grubby old hat, along with his equally dirty faded blue overalls that have holes in the knees. These holes have come from all the hours he spends on his knees as he weeds and plants. He has even worn holes in the toes of his sneakers! For a person who works outside each day Dan is a surprisingly plump old chap whose double chin completely hides his neck. In fact I thought at first he didn't have a neck! I could see no sign of it. Often I see Dan eating his favorite food - ice cream - while he is working away in the garden. That will be why he looks so much like a roly-poly garden gnome with his wispy grey hair sticking out from under his floppy old hat and his fat tummy wobbling like a jelly as he plods around his garden.

Dan hates snails. He says they eat his precious plants so he goes out at night to catch them and drowns them in buckets of hot water. He says, "I will never use snail bait as long as I live!" He believes the good animals, like hedgehogs, would eat it and they would also die. Dan actually believes the best way to deal with pests is the natural way. He believes he is a natural predator for the snails so that is how he will deal with snails in his garden. "I am going out on snail patrol," he says to his wife as he disappears into the darkness lugging a bucket of steaming water.

Explosion Chart

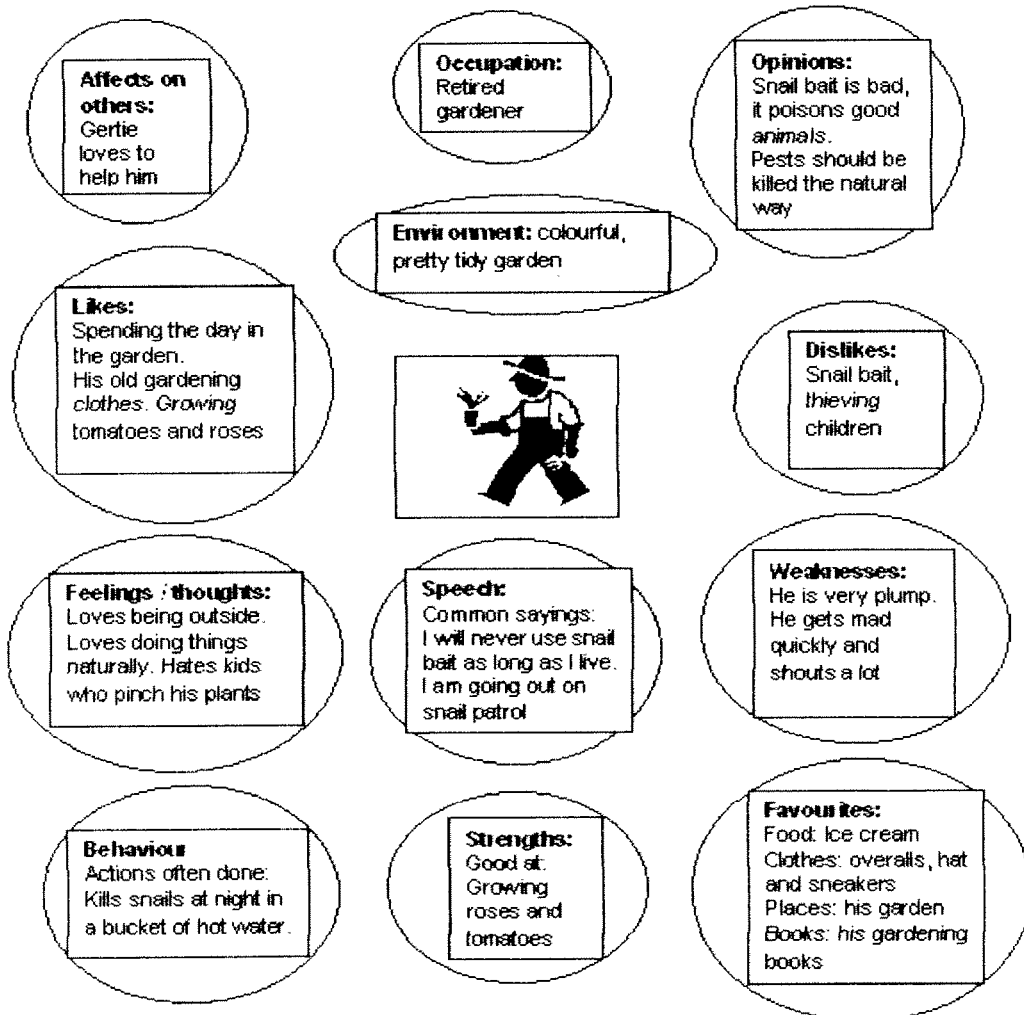


Character Map

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Character Sketch Ideas

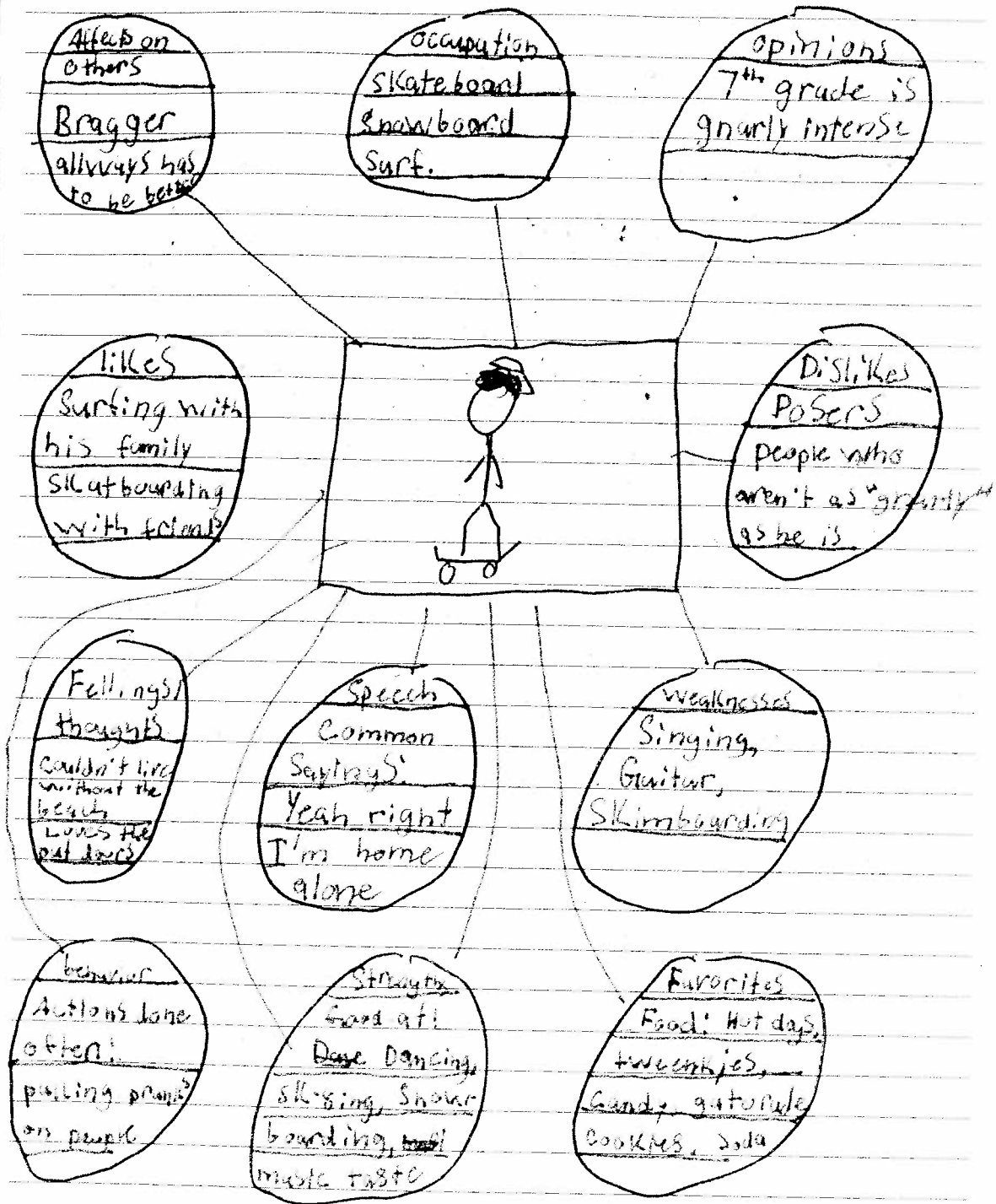
- Environment/belongings (*setting*)
- Talents and strengths
- Weaknesses
- Likes/dislikes
- Speech (accent, typical sayings, intonation, volume, pitch etc)
- Attitudes and opinions
- Effect on others
- Occupation/hobbies
- Feelings/thoughts
- Tastes in (ie. favourites)- music, movies, sport, books, food, holidays, animals, places etc
- Behaviour - typical of the character



Character Map

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H.W.
2-5-08



Explosion Chart

2-5-08



GW

2-6-08

Garet McMakin looks as if he has been put through a paper shredder. With cuts everywhere, I'm pretty sure he gets a new one every day. On his arms, it looks as if ^{white/red} chicken pox are embedded under his skin. His black holey pants cling to his legs so tight, it looks as though he's wearing a jump suit. His old faded shirts are ~~these~~ obiesley 3 sizes too small. The only thing that isn't old and faded, and has holes in it, is his red and white RVC but that I got him for his ~~her~~ birthday.

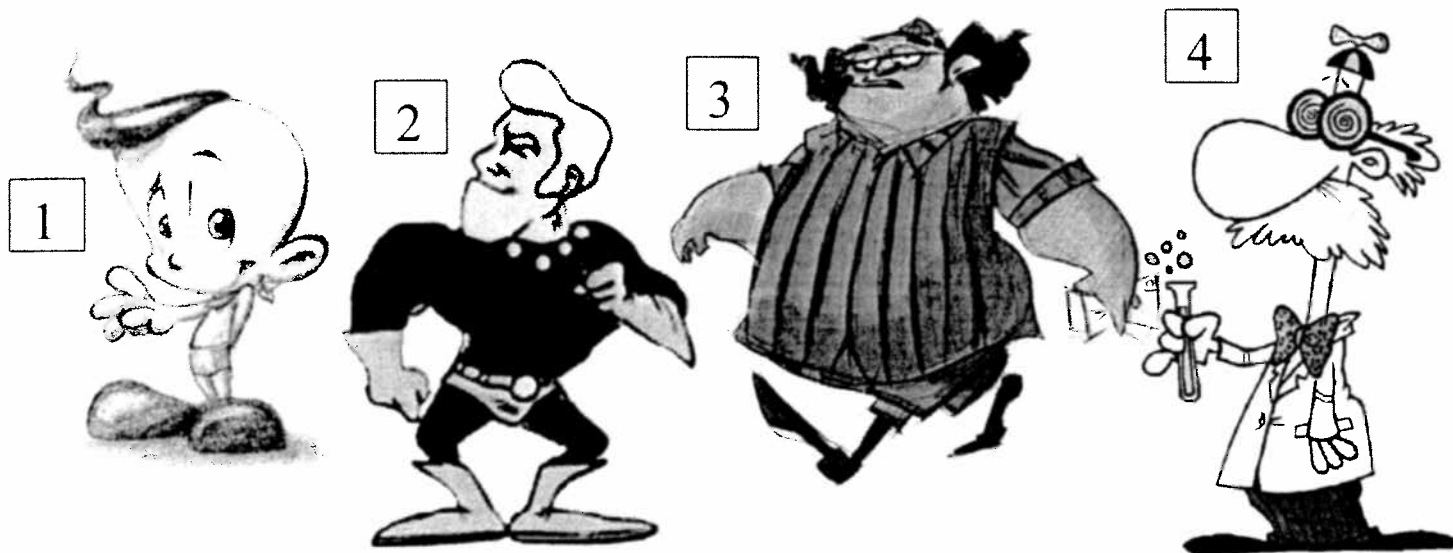
Garet loves pulling pranks on ~~the~~ people. You name it he's done it. From the classic tickle the nose and smack shaving cream in the face act, to ding dong ditching, to ducktaping, to toilet papering, and even water ballooning cars.

Twinkies, Hot dogs, Soda, candy, cookies, pizza, Gatorade. These are some of Garet's favorite food. Whenever I go over his house, all he has for snacks is Junk. From chocolate, to Mountain Dew, to Red, blue, Green, yellow, and clear Gatorade. I'm surprised he's as skinny as a stick.

Name: _____ Date: _____

18

Take a good look at these cartoon character designs. Can you describe who they are by looking at the pictures?



1) Describe this character (look at the body, face, clothes, and accessories – think about style, personality, and proportion):

If you could give him a name, what would you call him?

2) Describe this character (look at the body, face, clothes, and accessories – think about style, personality, and proportion):

If you could give him a name, what would you call him?

3) Describe this character (look at the body, face, clothes, and accessories – think about style, personality, and proportion):

If you could give him a name, what would you call him?

4) Describe this character (look at the body, face, clothes, and accessories – think about style, personality, and proportion):

If you could give him a name, what would you call him?

Name: _____ Date: _____

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Character Design Worksheet

1) My seed idea (a person, place, thing, sport, animal... anything):

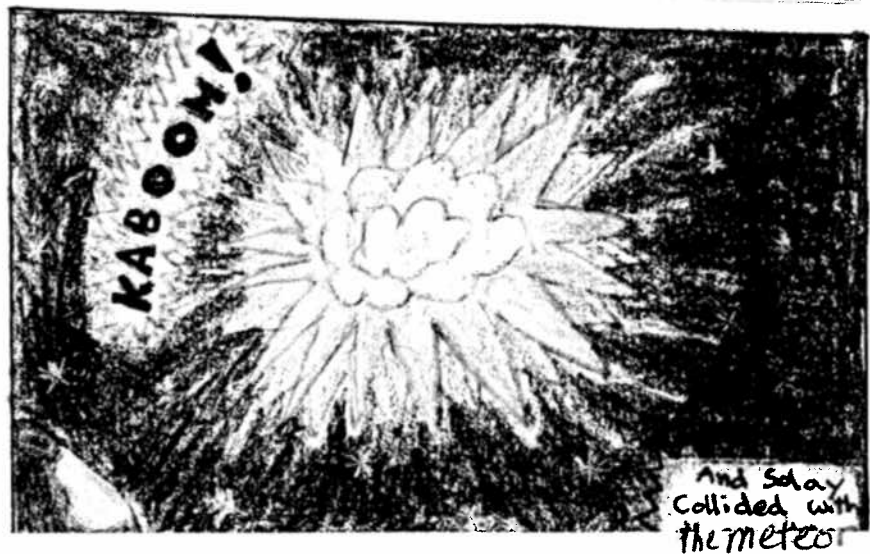
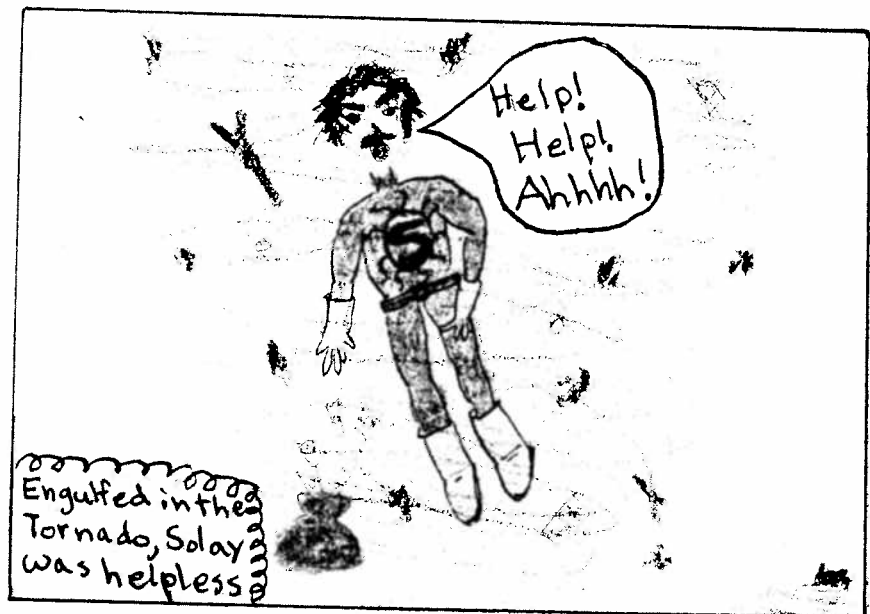
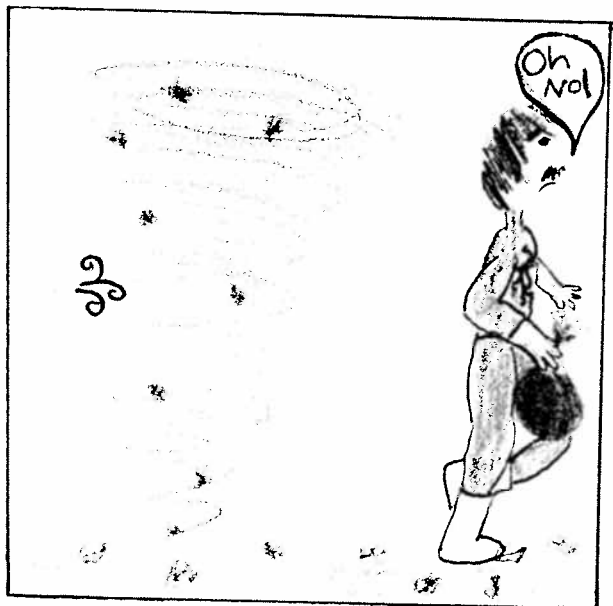
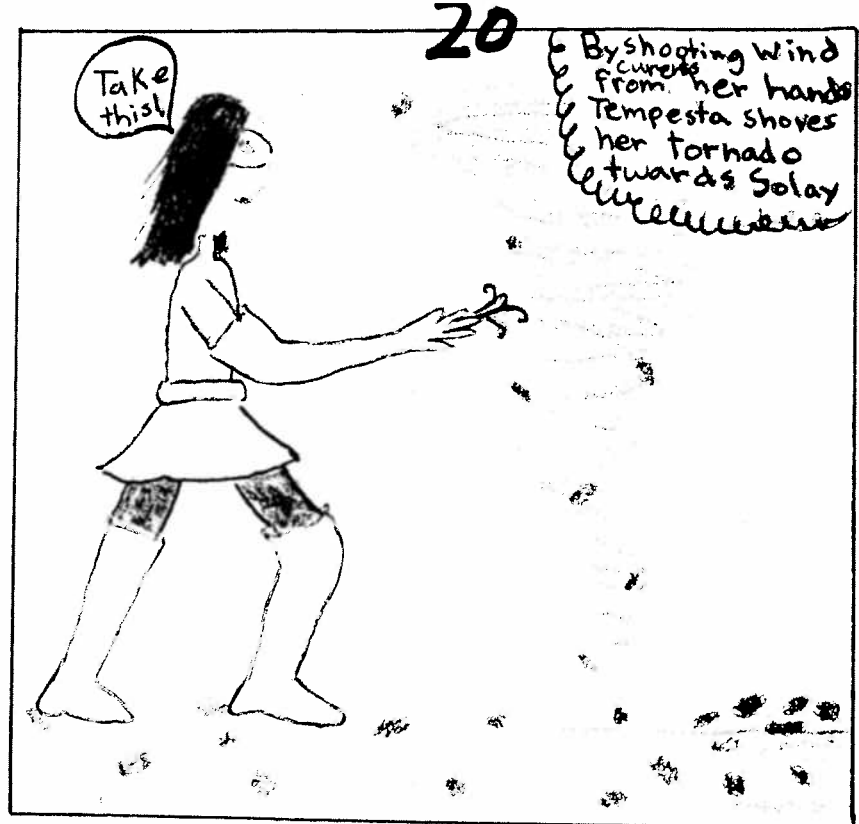
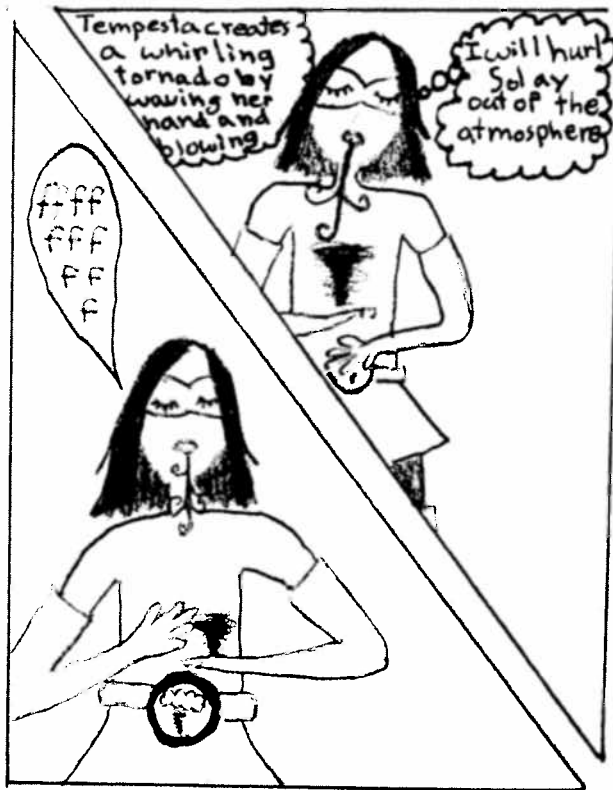
2) Type of character (boy, girl, thing, robot, animal, alien... whatever you wish):

3) Style (realistic or distorted):

4) Personality (happy, sad, mean, angry, heroic, beautiful, ugly, smart, dumb...):

5) Character's job (police, sports player, fire fighter, dragon slayer, student, karate expert...):

6) Clothes and accessories (describe the clothes or uniform your character wears, including special accessories like a cape, a sword, a baseball glove...):



Michelle Antonorsi
2/28/08
P.1

Tempesta

Aurora Grail is no ordinary tour guide. Whenever criminals are on the lurk or cats get stuck in trees, they call her Tempesta. A woman that can control the weather with her own bare hands and can fly faster than any bird on Earth. With the wave of a hand she can create a hurricane or a thunderstorm that could spread across the globe. She was not always like that though. She grew up on the windy planet of Cyclone, where she lived with her mother, father, and twin sister, until Solay, her arch enemy found he could control a star, and used it to incinerate her planet. He killed her family and destroyed her home leaving her with nothing. Having nowhere else to turn, she packed her few belongings and flew to Earth in a shuttle.

As she dove through Earth's atmosphere, she lost control and flew into a unique storm cloud that released a charge as she passed through, knocking Tempesta unconscious. When she regained consciousness, she found that she had super natural storm powers.

Since then she's lived at the foot of the Himalayas as a tour guide named Aurora Grail with her messenger falcon, Squall. Her neighbors think she's an irresponsible fool that spends all day on the couch watching TV, but really she spends time in her headquarters, a cloud at the top of Mount Everest.

Tempesta doesn't usually talk to people, but when she needs to she sends Squall, her pet falcon with a message. People on Earth find that highly disturbing, so they try to stay away from her. When she guides a tour though, she tries to act as normal as possible, but when the tourists walk very slowly she sends a wind to pull them towards her. When she does it too often though, the tourists run away in fear. Fortunately, her boss does not fire her because of how alert and attentive she is while protecting the tourists.

Tempesta designed a special bulletproof dress with dark blue tights that she wears with silver boots, gloves and the most importantly, a silver mask. She wears it while defeating her enemies or helping the police track down criminals. This way no one will recognize her and she will be able to have an almost normal tour guide life.

4 – Outstanding! Your Superhero Project:

- ☐ Includes a Character Sketch that is at least 1 page long with correct spelling & punctuation.
- ☐ Uses many examples of both powerful verbs and superhero lingo.
- ☐ Describes the character's physical appearance and personality in detail, including specific super powers (*Who? What? & How?*).
- ☐ Contains 1 example of super dialogue & onomatopoeia – COMIC STRIP ONLY.
- ☐ Has the assigned number of comic panels covering 2 pages (at least 4 for a group of 1 member, 6 for a group of 2, and 8 for a group of 3) – COMIC STRIP ONLY.
- ☐ Includes a 1 page write-up (printed in 12 point font) explaining the action & 2 specific super powers – ANIMATION ONLY.
- ☐ Has 10 – 15 animation frames – ANIMATION ONLY.

Shows strong evidence of techniques from our cartooning lessons

Name: _____

Character Sketch Rubric

Assignment Criteria	Superior	Good	Needs Work
Sketch captures the essence of the character through physical appearance, actions, speech, behavior, and interactions with other.			
Sketch is fully developed using specific descriptions, details, and anecdotes.			
Sketch includes details of human behavior such as nervous ticks, dialect, or body language.			
Sketch provides insight into the character's environment, culture, and thinking.			
Sketch is written with vivid and precise word choices, effective imagery, and sentence variety.			
Sketch has been shared with peer revision group and revised by student			
The sketch has been checked for punctuation, sentence fragments, and spelling.			